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Darklands (The Rhenwars Saga Book 3)



Synopsis

He was once their greatest champion. Now he's their fiercest adversary. Compelled to obey the dark god he pledged his soul to, Darien finds himself tasked with delivering the people of the Black Lands from under the curse of darkness which shrouds the skies. With the enemy mage Azrafir, Darien sets out across a barren landscape to assume his place as the leader of a people who despise him. As he journeys deeper into the shadowed waste, Darien is confronted with difficult truths that force him to question every loyalty he has ever held. For there, in the brutal proving grounds of the north, Darien will be inexorably forged into the most dangerous adversary the Rhen has ever faced. Darklands is the third installment in the epic grimdark fantasy series The Rhenwars Saga. If you like morally gray heroes, page-turning action, and mind-boggling plot twists, then you'll love Spencer's award-winning series. Pick up Darklands to continue Spencer's epic adventure today!

"An extraordinary fantasy with exceptional characters."

• Arya Fomonyuy, Readers' Favorite

"A complete, dark, anything-goes fantasy."

• Elizabeth Munro, West Coast Book Reviews

"A powerful saga of confrontation and survival"

• D. Donovan, Senior Reviewer, Midwest Book Review

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Customer Reviews

M.L. Spencer's novels are expertly woven fantastical tales that encompass more than mere fantasy. Darklands (book III) is no exception. In this continuation of the Rhenwars saga, we're reunited with some of the characters we've grown to love (or loathe) within DarkStorm and DarkMage. M.L. Spencer's characterization and conflicts reaches new heights as Azir unseals the gateway to the Well of Tears, raising the Eight. With that summoning, the peace of the Rhen is threatened by enlisting their former savior to become their fiercest adversary. Darien struggles to complete the tasks assigned to him by the dark lord (Xerys) that he's obligated to obey, while remembering the love and life he led in the Rhen. Conflicted by memories of a life that no longer belongs to him; he strives to gain the honor of peoples that he nearly destroyed. After messengers are dispatched to the Rhen, this epic tale unfolds in a masterful way. My favorite character, Quin, plays a major role in assisting Darien and protecting (the Prime Warden) Meiran on a perilous journey to the Dark Lands. That assistance is not without a hefty price and sacrifices to both human and demon alike. Through their journey, you learn more of the complexity of Quin, as well as the true nature and elitism of Meiran. Darien's conflicts dominate Darklands, and his tormentor (Nashir) twists the proverbial knife at every turn. As he travels with a woman who loathes him, to free a people who want him dead, he's haunted by a love forever lost. Can he overcome the abuses and demonic hordes to reclaim what's been taken, or succumb to the brutalities of a world where he no longer belongs? Darklands is an exceptional continuation in the Rhenwars Saga, and I'm looking forward to the next novel. The decisions made in Darklands will have detrimental consequences for both worlds, separated by darkness and light.

DARKLANDS is the third novel in the Rhenwars series that is sort of an inversion of the Wheel of Time. The story begins with the protagonists doing their absolute best to fight the various forces of darkness as well as prevent the end of the world as their methods become more extreme, only for

them to gradually come to sympathize with the so-called evil doers as their understanding of the universe expands. In the previous novels, we've had protagonists Branden and Darien break out all the stops in order to prevent underworld god Xerys' forces from overrunning the world. However, Branden's brother Quin and now Darien were both forced to swear unbreakable oaths to serve the hellish deity that have forced them onto the other side. Transformed into, essentially, Ringwraiths, they have been given the task of leading the people of the Darklands from their life in the eternal night. Rather than find a bunch of Satan-worshipping evil doers, they find an advanced culture which is always living hand-to-mouth due to the fact they have been forced to live in a desert with no sunlight. They can only survive due to the presence of magic and wish to escape their hellish domiciles. Darien's sympathy soon swells, especially as he discovered he's murdered legions of people who just wanted to secure a better life for their descendants. Darien's former lover, Meiran, is troubled by this development because she has a one-dimensional view of the conflict as one between good versus evil. She's very much Wrong Genre Savvy™ in that she thinks she's in a Tolkien-esque story where the evil doers are one side where the good guys are on the other but it's actually a grimdark tale by an author much more interested in questioning those assumptions. In fact, the "good" guys have always been incredibly hypocritical and self-righteous in the Rhenwars books. With the invasion of the world on the horizon, the lesser kingdoms and religious orders are more interested in letting their defenders bleed themselves out rather than offering an ounce of support. The fact the mages have been reduced to almost nothing is a sign the other factions can strip them of their authority as well as power to influence them. There's romance in this novel but it's an interesting take on the whole "destined lovers" which we normally see in fantasy. Darien sacrificed everything, including his soul, for Meiran and she's disgusted by what he's become. Naia deeply loves Darien despite what he's become but he honestly just sees her as a friend. Quin's lover has been dead and gone for a thousand years but he still holds a torch for her. It's all nice, dark, and well-written which subverts a lot of common cliché. The only problem I have with Darklands is that it ends on a cliffhanger and it is the first book which doesn't give a definitive conclusion to its storyline. I was quite fond of the fact the stories were "one and done" beforehand. 9/10

Darien Lauchlin was ready to give up his life to protect the lands of the Rhen and save the soul of the woman he loved. But he damned himself in the process and now he has to pay the price. Even if it means turning against everyone he had cared about. Set two years after Darkmage, Darklands continues the story by having Darien brought back, but this time in service to the very people he had spent his life training to fight. Given the task of leading the people of the Darklands into the lands of

the Rhen to escape a potential cataclysm, he is forced to re-evaluate everything he believed. The more he learns about the Darklands and its people, the more he is driven to question his previous perspective on them. At the same time, he is continually confronted by people, particularly his guide, who fear and hate him for the destruction he wrought against the last army to approach the Rhen. Darien's conflicts are the core of the book but the supporting characters have their own crises as well. Some are still adjusting to their new abilities, while Meiran, Darien's former love has to deal with the knowledge that he sacrificed himself to save her and his apparent betrayal of their cause. Their reunion/confrontation towards the end of the book is definitely wrenching for both of them and brilliantly written. What Darklands does most successfully is challenge the beliefs (and assumptions) of the main characters, by painting the other side of the conflict we saw in Darkmage. But there is still plenty of action and intrigue, as well as an expansion of the world, both by exploring the Enemy and introducing (or re-introducing) some new players in the conflict. My main problem with the book was where it ended. It was an appropriate place to stop but I couldn't help wishing there was more. That aside, I really enjoyed coming back to this world as well as the complete subversion of my expectations for it. Book 4 can't come soon enough.

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